



SEE DESIGN

Sharing Experience
on Design Support
for SMEs

Case Study of Good Design Support Practice

This case study is a snapshot of activities taking place during the lifespan of the SEEdesign project from 2005 to 2007. For updated information please contact the organisations directly.

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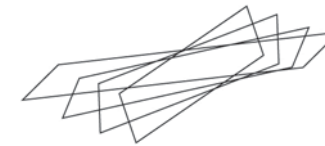


**PROJECT PART-FINANCED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Belgium

Design Center De Winkelhaak

Design Center De Winkelhaak



DESIGNCENTER | DE WINKELHAAK



At the end of the 20th Century, the area around Lange Winkelhaakstraat, near the central train station in Antwerp, Belgium, was known as a centre for drugs, prostitution and other kinds of urban trouble. The City government was committed to resolving some of these problems and the idea for a design centre was warmly received.

The plan was to provide a generator of activity and creativity in this run-down area of the city where product designers, architects, graphic and multimedia designers would communicate with the neighbourhood through the open façade of the structure in order to inspire, create confidence and bring about a regeneration. With all the studios on the outside, the building façade would become a constantly changing display of the residents' work. At the same time, external sunblinds and internal curtains would add more options for visibility, privacy and comfort. The central areas would be communal spaces in which cross-pollination of disciplines and ideas would occur. This was fundamental to the design of the building – enabling different disciplines to share ideas and opportunities and increase the likelihood of them coming together to form larger design studios which would then move out of the Center into other buildings in the area.

In May 2000 a group of derelict houses were demolished to create space for the Center. The building that replaced them, which opened in September 2001, has a pure and clear structure, functional and transparent, with special attention given to the use of durable materials, internal flexibility of space and environmentally friendly systems. The building's design enhances the interaction of the designers within the building and offers an ever-changing view to those in the surrounding area.

Funding for the project came from the European Union, the Flemish District and the City of Antwerp, but these funds only covered the building construction – not

the interior or the running costs. In addition, then, a number of private investors were asked to become shareholders in the public limited company 'Design Center De Winkelhaak'. It was important to the vision of the Center that these shareholders be actively involved in the design industries and willing to invest in the social and professional impact of the Center, not just the economics. These private funds ensured the completion of the building interior and guaranteed the Center's operation until it became self-financing. The active commitment of these shareholders is considered at least as important as their financial support.

The Center houses a reception area, exhibition space, library, photo studio, lounge, 18 studios for rent and is now a self-financing business centre for young designers. The fabric of the building is a combination of permanence and flexibility. The concrete finish creates a unified feel and the spaces adapt easily to different requirements. Access to each studio space is through a large sliding door off the internal corridors. The design of these doors encourages the designers to leave them open, so increasing the interaction which is such a vital part of the Center's effectiveness in the longer term.

Tenants pay an inclusive rent which covers space, light, heat, internet access, print facilities, tea/coffee and use of the communal spaces for meetings, presentations, press conferences, etc. De Winkelhaak operates as an incubator, providing both administrative and promotional support to the designers who are expected to move on to other premises as soon as this becomes appropriate.



The hope is that they will remain in the area and the Center actively promotes this, offering continued use of various facilities for an agreed fee, negotiating with landlords on their behalf and encouraging other design companies and new and specialised trades (for example a computer shop and an art materials supplier) to move into the area.

In addition, the building adjacent to the Center was bought and renovated by the City of Antwerp and given, as a bare shell, to De Winkelhaak who then found investors willing to finance the completion of the building and rent part of it as their own business premises. De Winkelhaak do not deliver any services to these businesses and the rent goes directly to help finance the Center. When space becomes available the designers in De Winkelhaak are given first refusal should they be ready to move on. The long established Belgian design retailer, Scoonwoon, occupies the main floor, selling Kartell and other high quality products.

Since the Center opened, the safety and general environment of the area has improved. Prostitution and the other industries that once defined it have generally moved elsewhere. The Design Center De Winkelhaak has already made a significant and lasting contribution to both Antwerp and the design industry, and it continues to expand. The second phase of the building will be completed by the end of August 2007, providing a new meeting room, administration area, coffee shop, an archive and a library for innovative materials ([HYPERLINK "http://www.materio.com"](http://www.materio.com) \o "http://www.materio.com" www.materio.com). It is also committed to growing as an independent business, expanding the team to provide a range of training, both short and long term, to designers in the Center and the wider design community. In the long term they plan to attract more design retailers and businesses to the area and so establish the neighbourhood around De Winkelhaak as the design district of Antwerp.

For more information please email the Center at: info@winkelhaak.be or visit: www.winkelhaak.be